

Design Workout 1- Design Iterations

For my first design workout submission, I decided to complete the Design Iterations assignment. I have done some design work in the past (flyers throughout college, and more recently my own social networking website) so I thought it would be a great way to apply my skills in a more structured way. After having read the required readings on visual design, I believe I have a good grasp on the basics, and I have used what I learned from the readings to inform my write-up.

The website I chose to redesign is an e-commerce website that a friend of mine is launching called Compare. Their website uses a patented algorithm to help customers easily compare electronics by using a set of sliders that allow them to refine their search results based on attributes such as battery life, screen size, etc. Their website is a very tough sell to potential users because they have to essentially convince users that Compare is better than whatever they are already using to make decisions on electronics. Not only do they need to prove it's better, they need to prove that's it much better, so much better that it's worth the cost of switching to a new site. All this to say, an attractive user interface and great user experience are critical to the success of their website. I thought this would be a great challenge to take on.

I decided to use Photoshop for Mac (CS4) to create my designs, mainly because I'm very familiar with the software and have used it many times. I've attached jpg version of the Photoshop files to this write-up to make the designs easier to view and cut down on file size on the wiki.

Iteration 1:

Most e-commerce websites, particularly comparison sites, are typically very crowded with lots of text and generally they have just too much content. I wanted to address these pain points with all of my design iterations. From the original design of Compare you get the feeling the site was created a few years ago, so I also wanted to give their current site a much more modern look and feel.

For my first iteration, I wanted to keep it very simple. I wanted to use a lot of white space, something their original homepage lacked. In "Homepage- Iteration 1", I went for a Google feel, nothing but the logo and the search bar and a lot of white space. I also gave the Compare logo a new look, with a rich blue with a light gradient to give it more weight. I also used a simpler magnifying glass icon (less detail) to give it a cleaner look and feel. I used a different shade of blue for the main "compare" button to give it some contrast and also draw the users eye to the button. My goal was to make the homepage simple and really help the user to see what the site is all about. Simply enter the keywords for the electronics you want to compare.



Original Homepage



Homepage- Iteration 1

In “Screen 1- Iteration 1” I stuck with the theme of using white space. I also wanted to use rounded corners for boxes to give the site a more modern feel. I went through quite a few iterations before deciding on how the sliders should be designed. The sliders are the key to a great user experience on Compare. The sliders are Compare’s main differentiator from other e-commerce comparison websites, it’s what they have a patented algorithm for. So the sliders needed to be easy to use and visually appealing. I stripped away the plus and minus signs for increasing/decreasing the different attributes in the sliders because I wanted to make the sliders simpler and cleaner. Users know what to do with sliders, so I felt like the plus and minus signs were unnecessary, this also goes along with my desire to give the site a more modern feel.

Font choice was rather painful for me because after reading one of the required readings, I felt as though I was forced to stick with one of five web fonts (Arial, Helvetica, Verdana, Georgia, or Times New Roman), and I do not particularly like any of them. Also because I know font can have a profound impact on a design, I like having the freedom to see which font works best with the particular work I am designing. I really wanted to use Cambria or Calibri (my two favorite fonts), but I ultimately decided to stick to the standards and use Helvetica for almost all the text in all the designs.

I gave the scroll bar for the laptop options a new look as well, a light grey that matches the grey used elsewhere in the design. One of the major design decisions I made was to add visual hierarchy in a few different ways. The original design had no real hierarchy, the laptop screen actually stood out because of the contrast of the blue. So I decided to draw the user’s attention to the first laptop, which is the top choice based on the user’s manipulation of the sliders. This should be the focus of the user’s attention so I wanted the design to reflect that. For the other laptop options, I wanted to also create a hierarchy but using progressive rhythm. So the darker grey represents the second choice, the lighter grey the next choice, and the lightest grey is the last choice. This design allows the user to see their options without needing much explanation, as the sliders move, the top choices would as well, but the colors would remain.

laptops, SLR cameras, HDTVs, etc. **compare** **Discovery Zone**

Dell Inspiron Laptop / Intel Core i5 Processor / 15.6" Display - Diamond Black




	Price	\$1,499.99	\$749.99	\$799.99	\$629.99	\$799.99
Processor Speed	Intel; Core; i7 2.0GHz	Intel; Core; i5 2.3GHz	Intel; Core; i5 2.0GHz	Intel; Core; i5 2.3GHz	Intel; Core; i5 2.3GHz	
RAM	8GB	8GB	6GB	6GB	6GB	
Screen Size	17.3"	14.0"	14.0"	15.6"	15.6"	
Screen Resolution	1920x1080	N/A	1366x768	1366x768	N/A	
Battery Life	3 hours	3 hours	8:24 hours	6:50 hours	7:26 hours	

Original Screen 1

laptops, TVs, mp3 players **compare** **compare**

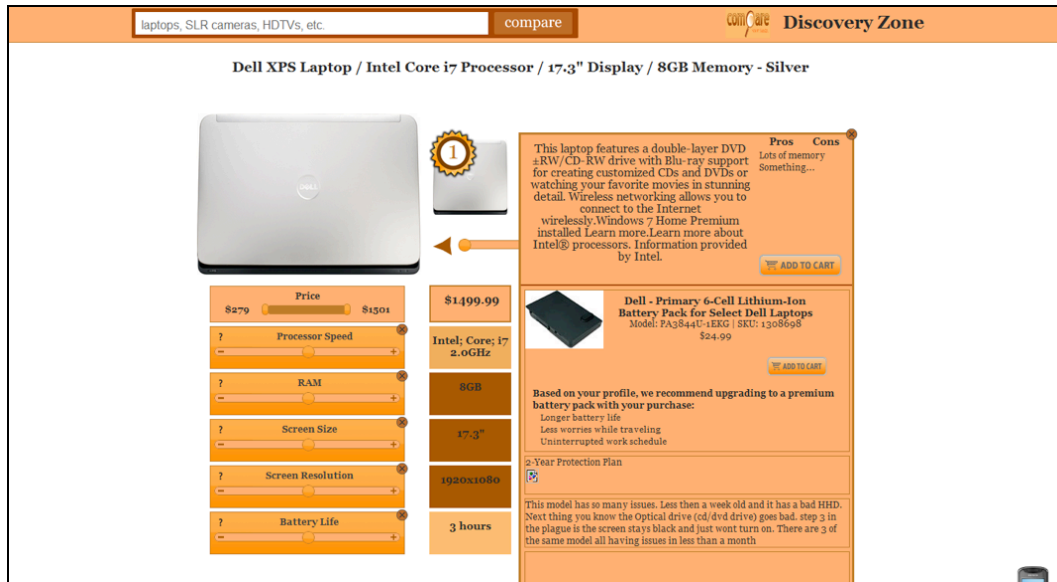
Dell Inspiron Laptop / Intel Core i5 Processor / 15.6" Display - Diamond Black



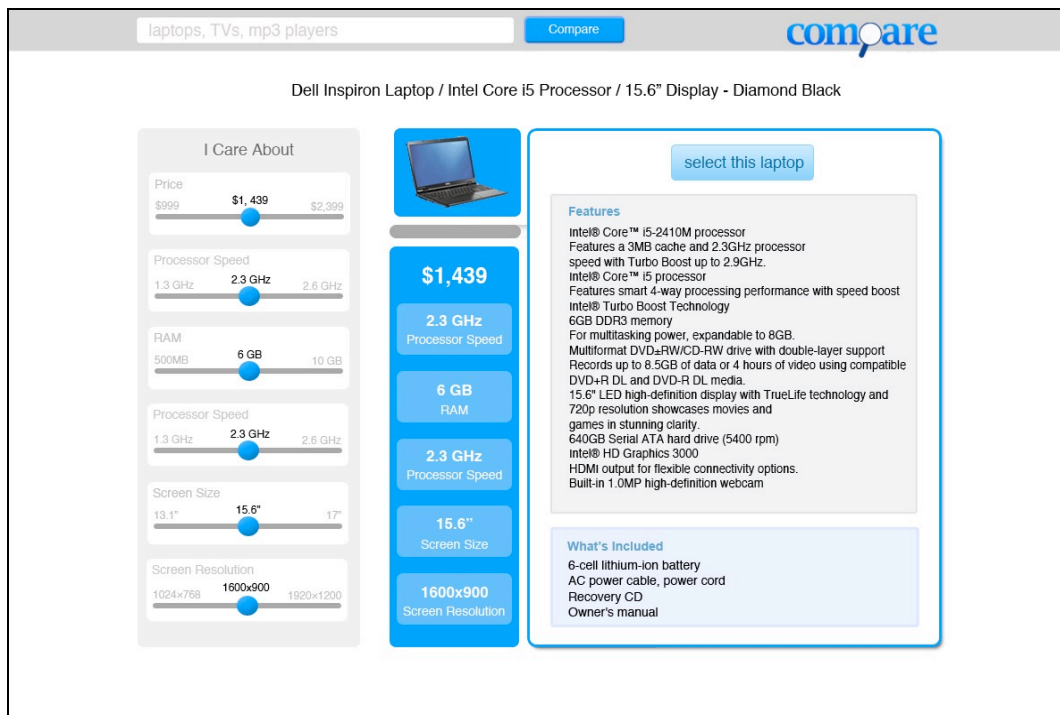
	\$1,439	\$1,439	\$1,439	\$1,439
2.3 GHz Processor Speed	2.3 GHz Processor Speed	2.3 GHz Processor Speed	2.3 GHz Processor Speed	2.3 GHz Processor Speed
6 GB RAM	6 GB RAM	6 GB RAM	6 GB RAM	6 GB RAM
2.3 GHz Processor Speed	2.3 GHz Processor Speed	2.3 GHz Processor Speed	2.3 GHz Processor Speed	2.3 GHz Processor Speed
15.6" Screen Size	15.6" Screen Size	15.6" Screen Size	15.6" Screen Size	15.6" Screen Size
1600x900 Screen Resolution	1600x900 Screen Resolution	1600x900 Screen Resolution	1600x900 Screen Resolution	1600x900 Screen Resolution

Screen 1- Iteration 1

In “Screen 2- Iteration 1” I wanted to follow the original design and allow the user to see details on an item without having to go to a separate webpage. So the details that are displayed are actually displayed on top of the other options, a sort of pop-up. From there the user can click “select this laptop” and they are taken to one of the affiliate websites such as Best Buy. I used a light blue for the select button to bring the user’s attention to the button, whereas I gave the text boxes very light and dull colors.



Original Screen 2



Screen 2- Iteration 1

In my second iteration of the homepage, I wanted to use much more color and give the site some excitement and a personality. At the same time I wanted to keep the theme of using white space and keeping the homepage very simple. I played around with a few different color combinations, finally settling on one that I think worked well. I decided on the color combination and then tried to totally redesign the logo, focusing on creating more of a logo rather than just a fancy font. For the search box, I wanted to bring more attention to the compare button, so I made the search box grey.

In “Screen 1- Iteration 2” I kept the same general visual structure, keeping the sliders simple, just changing the color of the circles indicating where the slider position is, I wanted to bring more attention to it by using a light orange. I also kept the same general visual hierarchy, using green to highlight the number one recommendation. However, I decided to remove the progressive rhythm and simply use a regular rhythm for the second, third, and fourth choices. I did this to make the top choice even more dominant, while making the other options subordinates so that they receded to the background. From the user’s perspective I was thinking “just show me what I should buy based on what I did with the sliders, make it easy.”

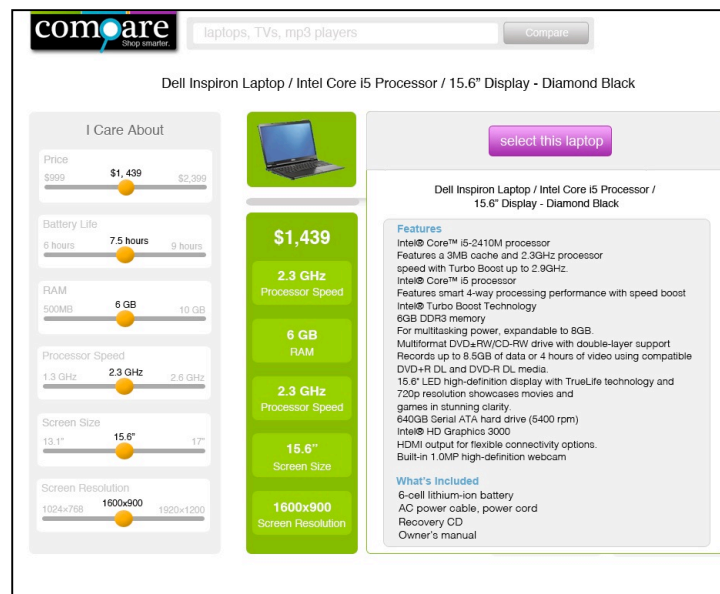
In “Screen 2- Iteration 2” I tried to give the detailed view of the product some more structure by placing the text into one box, with the name of the product outside of it, which also helped to bring more attention to the title of the product. I also wanted to bring the “select this laptop” button to the forefront, so I used a vivid purple, the last color within the color scheme I chose.



Homepage- Iteration 2



Screen 1- Iteration 2

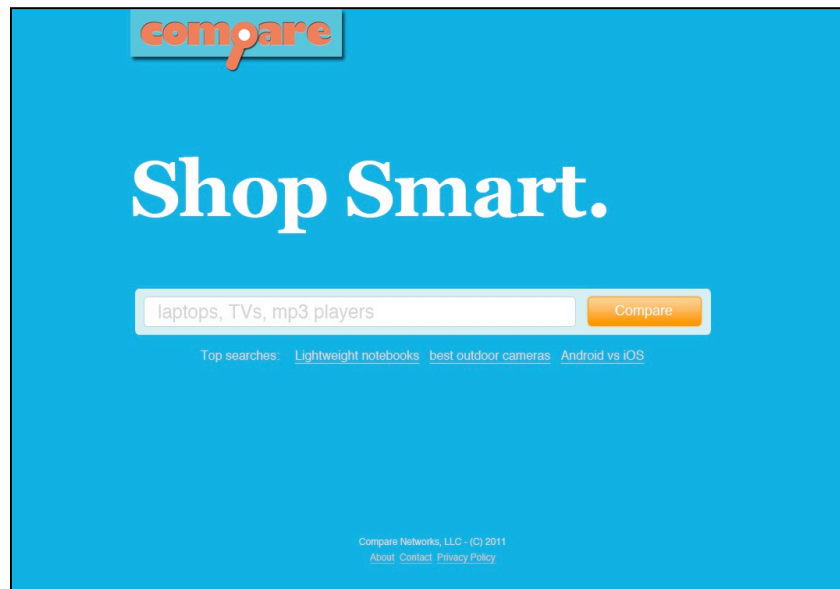


Screen 2- Iteration 2

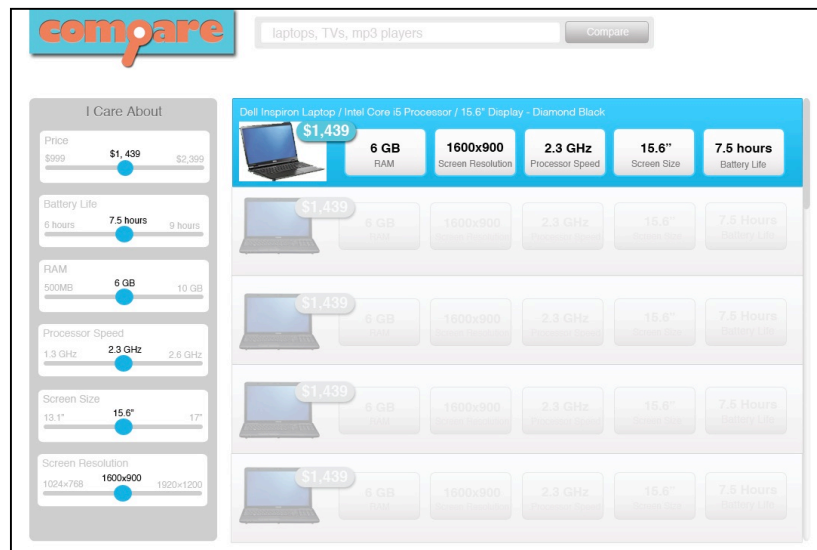
In my final iteration of the homepage, I wanted to move away from using white space and just use a color that was soft yet strong enough to keep the user's attention. So for the background I chose a cold cyan color, and for the logo I chose colors that both complimented the cyan and contrasted against it. I thought about using a radial gradient to show a lighter area around the search box, but eventually decided it was best to the background simple, especially with the color I chose. For the search box, I chose a very light sky blue for its outline to bring more attention to it, with a bright orange with gradient for the compare button. One of the other major design choices I made was to enlarge the "Shop Smart" text. I did this to help the user immediately see what this website is about. They have most likely never heard of Compare, yet they can clearly see that it's all about "shopping smart."

In "Screen 1- Iteration 3" I focused on redesigning the layout of the different item choices. Rather than sticking with the typical vertical view, I switched to a horizontal view that I feel is much more natural for an ordered list. We are generally more used to seeing lists in a vertical orientation, so I thought it made sense. Here, I emphasized the top choice as the dominant object, by giving it more weight and also giving the other items much less weight, more than in the other designs. I tried something different to make the other options recede to the background as subordinates. I actually put a layer on top of the objects and decreased its opacity to give it a washed out look. What's not reflected in my design, is the idea that if the user hovers over the other options, they will come to life and the objects will be more visible, the top opaque layer would be removed to show the items, still with a grey background.

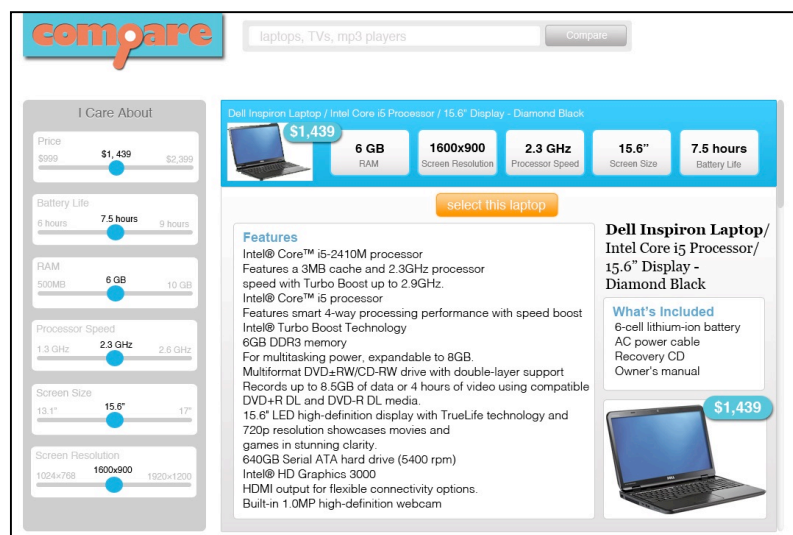
For "Screen 2- Iteration 3" I attempted to rearrange the content to accommodate the new horizontal orientation. I found myself with too much white space, so I added another picture of the selected laptop in the corner and an enlarged title. Although these were after-thoughts, I think they fit nicely with the new layout. I also included a light gradient behind the text boxes to give the entire detail box a bit more weight in a very subtle way.



Homepage- Iteration 3



Screen 1- Iteration 3



Screen 2- Iteration 3

Overall I truly enjoyed this assignment. Although it took me much longer than I expected to actually complete the designs, it forced me to think strategically about visual design, something I had never done before. I am used to simply designing based on what I believe looks good, but after completing the readings I had a much better appreciation for what it takes to make a well designed webpage. I gained a much better understanding of how design decisions should be made.

The original design for Compare, was in my opinion very dated and lifeless, it was not very welcoming for a new user who is used to webpages with beautiful designs. I think all of my designs give the site a much more modern look and feel, while keeping the original simplicity. I focused quite a lot on visual hierarchy and dominance, to make sure the user's attention was drawn to the right places. If one of my designs is actually implemented I'm confident Compare users will have a much more enjoyable experience (or at least their eyes will).